



RHODE ISLAND COMMISSION ON WOMEN

**FY 2007
ANNUAL
REPORT
EXECUTIVE
SUMMARY**

**RHODE ISLAND COMMISSION ON WOMEN
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PROVIDENCE, RI 02908
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RHODE ISLAND COMMISSION ON WOMEN
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

MISSION AND AREAS OF RESPONSIBILITY

Mission: The mission of the Rhode Island Commission on Women is to support women in achieving full equality in all areas of life, through the promotion of rights and opportunities for all women. Rhode Island Commission on Women envisions a society where all women have achieved full equity in all aspects of life. The Commission:

- is a forum where all women can be heard;
- embraces the concept of full participation by all Rhode Island women;
- facilitates opportunities for education and advocacy, through collaborating and networking.

Statutory History: In 1970 the General Assembly established a nonpartisan organization entitled the Permanent Advisory Commission on Women in Rhode Island. After 22 years of status as an advisory commission, in 1992, the General Assembly amended the General Laws of Rhode Island (Title 42, Chapter 119) to restructure the membership of the Commission and to change its status from an advisory body to an agency of Rhode Island Government charged with the responsibilities enumerated below.

Agency Operations: Rhode Island Commission on Women is a State agency established to improve opportunities for women and girls to achieve equity. The Commission studies and makes recommendations for improvements, including legislative, regulatory, and administrative actions and issues related to equal rights for women. In carrying out its responsibilities, the Commission works in cooperation with other governmental and private organizations to promote equity including – but not limited to – the following areas of concern: education, health, economic development, employment, legal rights, political participation and the quality of individual and family life.

The Commission consists of twenty-six members, including three each from the House and Senate, twelve public members appointed by the Governor, and eight members appointed by State agency directors. State agency participation may vary from year to year, depending upon the identification of priorities by the Commission. The Commission carries out its responsibilities through standing and ad hoc committees, the membership of which consists of appointed commissioners and numerous volunteers dedicated to the rights of women and girls.

Areas of Responsibility (R.I.G.L. 42-119-3):

- To advise and submit recommendations to the Governor and the General Assembly on issues relating to women;
- To gather and disseminate information to women and/or the general public on issues relating to women;

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- To develop and/or support programs or services for women consistent with the purpose of the Commission;
- To collaborate with concerned organizations, groups and State departments on issues of common concern;
- To educate and encourage women to exercise the right to vote; encourage candidacy for public office and promote the appointment of qualified women to boards, commissions and government positions at all levels;
- To evaluate, monitor and propose federal and state legislation and advise legislators on issues relating to women;
- To advocate for women's equity in the public, private and not-for-profit sectors.

FY 2007 ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Legislative and Legal Rights Committee:

In FY 2007 the Legislative and Legal Rights Committee reviewed twenty-four State and seven Federal bills. The Rhode Island Commission on Women voted to take action on ten State Bills, as follows:

RI Bills:

S. 0692/H. 5423/H. 5126/Relating to Criminal Offenses – Trafficking in Persons

H. 5355/Relating to Criminal Offenses – Prostitution and Lewdness

The Rhode Island Commission on Women supported these bills on principal. S. 0692 Sub B passed in concurrence and was signed into law on June 27, 2007.

S. 0360/Amending the Joint Resolution Creating a Permanent legislative Commission on Child Care

The Rhode Island Commission on Women supported this resolution. The resolution passed in concurrence on June 19, 2007.

S. 0024/Relating to Criminal Offenses- Failure to Pay Child Support

The Rhode Island Commission on Women supported this bill. The bill died in the Senate Judiciary Committee.

H. 5077/Relating to Renaming the new Sakonnet Bridge

The Rhode Island Commission on Women supported this bill. The bill died in the House Municipal Government Committee.

H. 5294/Relating to Labor and Labor Relations – Equal Opportunity and Affirmative Action

The Rhode Island Commission on Women supported this bill. The bill passed the House but died in the Senate Judiciary Committee.

S. 0205/Relating to Criminal Offenses – Sexual Assault

The Rhode Island Commission on Women supported this bill. The bill died in the Senate Judiciary Committee.

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H. 5290/Relating to Courts and Civil Procedure – General Government Tort Liability

The RIC supported this bill. The bill died in the House Judiciary Committee.

Additionally, the Rhode Island Commission on Women voted to take action on three Federal Bills, as follows:

Federal Bills:

H.R. 20/Melanie Blocker Stokes Postpartum Depression Research and Care Act

H.R. 88/Eating Disorders Awareness, Prevention and Education Act of 2007

The Rhode Island Commission on Women supported both of these acts by urging Congressman Kennedy to include them in his Mental Health Bill. Congressman Kennedy has signed on as a co-sponsor on H.R. 20.

H.R. 406/S. 826/Alice Paul Congressional Gold Medal Act

The Rhode Island Commission on Women supported this act by urging Rhode Island's United States Senators and Congressman to sign on as co-sponsors of this bill. Congressman Kennedy did so.

Health Committee

The Health Committee prioritized the following issues, which were then presented to the full Commission for approval:

NOTE: *Prioritize based on the needs of the underserved and vulnerable populations of women, whether that be by race/ethnicity, age, geography, etc.*

◆ **Legislative Advocacy**

Historically, this is the area where the Rhode Island Commission on Women Health Committee has focused the bulk of its work. Position papers were created on such topics as: Access to Health Care, Ethical, Legal and Social Implications of Genetic Testing, Genetics, Health Care Response to Domestic Violence, Health of Women Elders, Osteoporosis, Quality of Health Care, Women and Cancer, Women's Health.

NOTE: *The Committee sees this as their highest priority.*

◆ **Mental Health**

Mental Health services still lag behind other medical treatments in coverage by insurers. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), "Overall rates of psychiatric disorder are almost identical for men and women but striking gender differences are found in the patterns of mental illness." In addition to gender specific risk factors, such as gender-based violence, socioeconomic disadvantage,

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low income and income inequality and unremitting responsibility for the care of others, gender bias occurs in treatment, with women being more likely than men to be prescribed psychotropic drugs.

◆ ***Gaps in Re-Entry Services for Incarcerated Women***

Currently, aftercare and discharge planning occurs for women exiting prison. The Department of Corrections Transitional Services/Discharge Planners work with inmates within six months of release. Transitional Services contracts with 20 community agencies who begin their work with inmates while still incarcerated in order to increase the number of services accessed upon release. However, there seems to be a disconnect between medical discharge planning and general discharge planning. Once released, former inmates have no health insurance and so may not be able to access health and behavioral health services in the community. The gap in urgent care access and possible lack of knowledge on the part of health centers about reimbursements applicable to uninsured females create systems delay access by vulnerable population to the medical and psychiatric/behavioral care they need.

NOTE: *The Committee sees these issues as their second highest priority.*

◆ ***Elder Care***

The majority of elders in Rhode Island are female. The majority of primary caregivers to both children and elders are female. As parents live longer and people have children later in life, women become more deeply ensconced in the Sandwich Generation. According to the National Alliance for Care giving and AARP, the typical family caregiver is a 46-year-old woman caring for her widowed mother who does not live with her. She is married and employed. Approximately 60% of family caregivers are women. Women who are family caregivers are 2.5 times more likely than non-caregivers to live in poverty and five times more likely to receive Supplemental Security Income (SSI). Women average 14 years out of the paid labor force, primarily because of care giving responsibilities

NOTE: *The committee recommends supporting other lead agencies on these issues.*

◆ ***Other***

Coverage for HPV vaccine
Health Care ramifications of Human Trafficking

NOTE: *Both issues should be researched for more information about gaps in service and possible advocacy.*

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Outreach Committee

Rhode Island Commission on Women Website: The Rhode Island Commission on Women Website received 7,007 unduplicated hits during FY 07. The average number of monthly hits was 584.

Public Relations Activities: The Rhode Island Commission on Women has participated in numerous speaking engagements and other public forums including:

- Sunrise Rotary Club presentation
- “60 Days and Counting” Women in Politics Leadership forum in conjunction with Leadership Rhode Island
- 2007 Women of the Year interviews on *Amazing Women*
- 2007 Women of the Year interviews on *Vital Women*
- Participated in the Delta Steering Committee on Intimate Partner Violence
- Group facilitator at the Permanent Legislative Commission on Childcare Retreat
- 2007 Women of the Year Event
- Chaired the Congressional Forum for the Civil Rights Roundtable
- Networking event for the Rhode Island Women in Higher Education]
- Presentation to Project H.E.R.O.S./City Year
- Hosted the Civil Rights Roundtable Martin Luther King Jr. Legislative Forum
- 2007 Freda Goldman Education Award Event
- Outreach to the Women’s Legislative Caucus
- Presentation to the public on Human Trafficking
- Networking with the National Association of Women in Construction (NAWIC)
- Keynote speaker at NAWIC regional meeting
- Presentation at the Cunningham School
- Logistics coordination for the Emerging Women in Business Conference

Women of the Year Event: Historically, Rhode Island Commission on Women initiated and has regularly presented the *RI Women of the Year Award*. The event is an important way for Rhode Island Commission on Women to recognize the work of positive female role models who have made significant contributions to women in this state. Awards traditionally are presented at a dinner event for which tickets are sold. Proceeds from ticket sales cover the costs of the event, as well as grant awards to programs facilitating the purposes of Rhode Island Commission on Women in accordance with R.I.G.L. 42-119-7.

The 2007/2008 awardees were:

Dr. Lynn T. Antonelli: Dr. Antonelli is an engineer with the United States Navy and is a recognized researcher and world leader in the area of laser-based sensors technology. She pioneered an optical solution for detecting underwater sounds from the air. Since 1999, Dr. Antonelli has provided educational laser demonstrations to school children and judged local school. She has encouraged middle school and college age women to study math and science, giving them a window into the life of a female engineer.

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Sister Mary Reilly: Sister Mary Reilly has spent the last sixty years working for the betterment of girls and women. She is the founder and executive director of Sophia Academy and she was a founding member of such local area non-profits as McAuley House and Dorcas Place. Additionally she serves on the board of directors of the Rhode Island Rape Crisis Center (Day One), The Women's Center and the Genesis Center, to name a few. She has worked tirelessly to empower women and girls to meet the challenges of their world.

Karen F. Stein, Ph.D.: Dr. Karen Stein helped found and develop the Women's Studies Program at the University of Rhode Island (URI), and is its current Director. She also headed various committees to improve working conditions for part-time faculty, who are primarily women. As the co-chair of the URI President's Commission on the Status of Women, Dr. Stein co-authored the new parental leave policy and is currently working on new strategies to address sexual harassment and other issues of concern to women at URI.

Awards were presented at a dinner on October 3, 2007. Over 150 people attended the event which was hosted by Karen Adams of WPRI-12. Ticket sales covered the costs of the event and \$4,755 in sponsorship and donations were raised to support the Freda Goldman Education Fund which provides financial assistance to women in need who are continuing their education.

Women in Politics Leadership Forum:

In conjunction with Leadership Rhode Island, the Rhode Island Commission on Women the Women's Leadership Series: 60 Days and Counting: on September 7, 2006. Seventy-four people attended the event which encouraged women to run for office and participate in the political process.

Human Trafficking Presentation:

On February 12, 2007, the Rhode Island Commission on Women hosted international expert on human trafficking, Dr. Donna Hughes from the University of Rhode Island. The presentation which was open to the public, informed over 50 people about this modern day form of slavery, and pending legislation to eradicate it.

Education Committee

The goal of the Education Committee in FY 2007 was to develop a long-range plan regarding women in non-traditional trades. A non-traditional trade is defined by the Department of Labor as an occupation in which women comprise 25 percent or less of total employment. It is still the case that women are not entering fields traditionally held by men, even though those jobs generally pay more than the jobs traditionally held by women. The Committee began to gather data and to assess the issue of inequity in this area. Initial connections to other organizations interested in the issue have been made, specifically:

- The U.S. Department of Labor Women's Bureau

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- Rhode Island Department of Transportation
- University of Rhode Island Urban Field Center
- National Association of Women in Construction
- Big Sisters
- SER Jobs For Progress, Inc.

Fundraising began in FY 2007 for a research project to be completed by the University of Rhode Island Urban Field Center. The research would focus on:

Objectives and Tasks:

1. Develop a profile and set of indicators of RI for non-traditional employment to determine the extent of participation and retention of women in non-traditional careers. Indicators would include gender, age, race, ethnicity, education, immigrant status, migrant worker status, first generation, first language spoken, and percent of high school and college graduation of parents.
 - A. Establish baseline data for RI women to access non-traditional careers.
 - Examine the U.S. Census for RI and the RI Department of Labor and Training and other Agencies – define categories.
 - Examine the U.S. Census and other local data sources such as State Policy documents, the RI Department of Labor & Training, and other appropriate agencies.
 - Meet with local unions who have apprentice programs community based agencies like SER: Jobs for Progress; Workforce Development Task Forces: WIC, Workforce Investment Act (WIA)
 - B. To analyze gender equity and income patterns associated with woman entering non-traditional careers.
2. To determine the extent of access and opportunity of women into non-traditional careers in the State of Rhode Island.
 - A. To define non-traditional careers utilizing standard definition by the U.S. Department of Labor.
 - B. To inventory current training and education programs and services available for women to enter these careers.
 - C. To examine the number and proportion of women by cohort to be promoted in designated careers.
 - D. To examine the findings for trends and patterns concerning women.
 - E. To analyze the occupational pattern and female/male percent.
 - F. To analyze the occupational patterns in Rhode Island for changes in the proportion of women.
3. To examine and identify the barriers and challenges associated with woman entering and staying employed in non-traditional careers.

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- A. Identify several focus groups consisting of representatives of non-traditional employment to discuss barriers and challenges to women in non-traditional fields.
- B. Facilitate focus groups with women currently employed in non-traditional careers.

Findings

1. Identify non-traditional jobs with an over representation of women.
2. Identify the non-traditional jobs that have under representation of woman.
3. Identify the retention rate of women in education and training programs as well as entry in to non-traditional employment.
4. Highlight specific non-traditional careers.
5. Determine the barriers and challenges associated with participation in non-traditional careers.
6. Identify programs and services that remove the barriers and challenges.
7. Draft findings and recommendations to the Rhode Island Office of the Governor and the Rhode Island General Assembly on ways to eliminate barriers and address challenges.
8. Present findings to the Education Committee who will present the information to the Rhode Island Commission on Women.

Additionally, the Rhode Island Commission on Women, in partnership with Big Sisters of Rhode Island (BSRI), the Community College of Rhode Island (CCRI), and the National Association of Women in Construction (NAWIC), began in FY 2007 to seek funding for a *Girl's Non-Traditional Trades Expo (GNTT)*. GNTT will be a daylong event, geared toward middle and high school girls and their mothers, mentors, big sisters or teachers. GNTT will feature hands-on experiential learning opportunities in trade skills, networking with, and information from, women currently in the trades, and a luncheon with a successful non-traditional tradeswoman as keynote speaker. GNTT will be held in March of 2008, to coincide with Women's History Month, International Women's Day, and Women in Construction Week.

Program Goals:

The goals of the program are to:

- Introduce girls to non-traditional trades,
- Educate girls and women about steps and skills needed to enter non-traditional trades, and
- Encourage networking and outreach between girls and women interested in exploring the trades, and women currently in the trades.

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Strategies and Activities:

The focus of the event is to introduce girls to non-traditional trades. To that end, professional tradeswomen will demonstrate skills necessary for the trade and then allow girls the opportunity to try themselves. Ideally, the event would have participants from the construction trades such as welding, carpentry, masonry, plumbing, and electrical, as well as auto mechanics. Girls will utilize tools, and experience some actual tasks of each of the specific trades.

In addition, the participants will be free to network with the tradeswomen in the Expo portion of the program. In a large open space, moving from booth to booth, girls (and the adult women who accompany them) will have an opportunity for one-on-one chats with specific tradeswomen, learning more detailed information about the requirements to being successful in that trade. Take-aways will be distributed such as: fact sheets about earnings potential in the trades compared to traditional trades for women, step-by-step instructions on the process of entering the trades, networking information about tradeswomen professional organizations, and information about local CTE centers and CCRI's curriculum.

Finally, the participants will enjoy lunch and a keynote address by a successful tradeswoman. The goal is to nourish both body and mind, infusing girls with the notion that a non-traditional trade is not only possible but can be highly profitable and rewarding.

Freda H. Goldman Education Award

Rhode Island Commission on Women funds were able to provide \$1,800 in awards. Each recipient received a total of \$600. Awards were given to the three women named below at an event held on January 17, 2007.

Maria M. Ortiz is a single mother of three daughters, ages 4, 8 and 9. Ms. Ortiz is currently enrolled at the Community College of Rhode Island, pursuing an Associate's Degree in Business Administration in Real Estate. Her goal is to sell houses and become a broker. Her current Grade Point Average is 3.23.

Lynn M. Prentiss is a single mother on a 4 year old daughter. Ms. Prentiss is in her senior year at the University of Rhode Island, studying for a Bachelor's Degree in Secondary Education with a concentration in Mathematics. Her current Grade Point Average is 3.47.

Victoria J. Turon is a single mother of a 3 year old son. She is currently enrolled at the Community College of Rhode Island, studying for an Associate's Degree in Applied Science in Radiology. Her current Grade Pont Average is 3.44.

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ADDITIONAL ACTIVITIES

The Rhode Island Commission on Women is charged with the responsibility to collaborate with other organizations, groups, and state departments on issues of common concern and to advocate for women's equity in all areas of life. RHODE ISLAND COMMISSION ON WOMEN Commissioners or the Director, Project Management and Administration, are appointed to serve as liaisons between the Commission and outside boards and commissions in the public, private and not-for profit sectors.

List of appointments to various boards and commissions, FY 2007

- Attorney General's Domestic Violence Task Force – *Shanna Wells*
- Center for Women and Enterprise Advisory Board – *Shanna Wells*
- Civil Rights Roundtable – *Shanna Wells*
- Dept. of Corrections Advisory Board on Female Offenders – *Shanna Wells*
- Dept of Health, Office of Women's Health Advisory Board – *Carrie Bridges*
- Permanent Legislative Child Care Commission – *Shanna Wells*
- RI Coalition for Affirmative Action – *Shanna Wells*
- Emerging Women in Business Planning Committee – *Shanna Wells*
- DELTA Steering Committee on Intimate Partner Violence – *Shanna Wells*